

VZCZCXYZ0000
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #3252/01 1012130
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 112130Z APR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4065
INFO RUEHSW/AMEMBASSY BERN PRIORITY 1085
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 6711
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 7525
RUEHLP/AMEMBASSY LA PAZ APR 7902
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 3553
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID PRIORITY 8970
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 0310
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 9007
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 4204
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA PRIORITY 0080

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 003252

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/10/2016
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: ELN AND CUBAN THINKING ON EVE OF THIRD ROUND OF
EXPLORATORY TALKS

REF: A. BOGOTA 2965 (NOTAL)

[1](#)B. BOGOTA 2902 (NOTAL)

[1](#)C. BOGOTA 2657 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood
Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

Summary

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request. Please see para 11.

[1](#)2. (C) The Cubans are becoming more involved in the GOC-ELN exploratory talks, according to Norwegian diplomats and one of the Colombian civil society guarantors. Norwegian Charge in Bogota Sigurd Endresen said the Cubans were at the table for a portion of the most recent round of talks in Havana; civil society guarantor Moritz Akerman said the Cubans were actively trying to dissuade ELN military commander and negotiator Antonio Garcia from visiting Colombia, because they viewed a successful Colombia visit as a threat to the talks remaining in Havana. Akerman said Garcia still planned to arrive from Venezuela on April 17, but in deference to Cuban wishes he will stay only through April 21 rather than April 28, and will only visit Medellin rather than come to Bogota (confirmed by weekend press accounts). According to Akerman, Garcia will have "special food" prepared because the Cubans have warned him of the dangers of poisoning. The Norwegians said the ELN is treading water rather than making progress in the talks, and has a naive perspective on the pressure that civil society can bring to bear on the GOC. The Norwegians said they would not invite the ELN to Europe unless the ELN made a significant gesture on a cease-fire or ending kidnapping, and even in such cases would coordinate closely with the GOC. End summary.

Cubans Starting to Play Role in Talks

[1](#)3. (C) The Cubans are becoming more active in the GOC-ELN exploratory talks, according to Norwegian diplomats present in Havana and one of the GOC-ELN civil society guarantors. Norwegian charge Sigurd Endresen, accompanied by Norwegian negotiator involved in the process Johan Vibe, told polcouns April 5 that at a crucial point during the latest Havana

talks Peace Commissioner Restrepo asked representatives of the three "accompanying countries" (Norway, Spain, and Switzerland) to be in the room to help build confidence. The Cubans at that point also wanted a place at the table and got one. Endresen mentioned that he is being "courted" by the Cubans in Bogota, and said their attitude has changed. Previously, the Cubans were saying the process was not important until the FARC joined it. Now, however, the Cubans seem intent on playing a more substantive role. Endresen believes the ELN is negotiating a deal with the FARC -- ELN members who do not want to be part of the process go to the FARC; in return, the FARC does not obstruct the GOC-ELN peace process. The Norwegians believe the ELN is/was faced with a choice: get into drugs to finance their activities, or find a political solution. The majority chose the latter option. The Norwegians also believe Havana is not the best place to negotiate.

¶4. (C) Guarantor Moritz Akerman told D/polcouns April 6 that ELN negotiator Francisco Galan told him the Cubans are actively trying to persuade ELN negotiator and military commander Antonio Garcia not to come to Colombia on April 17 as planned (refs A, C). They say Garcia would face having his food poisoned and could not count on the GOC to provide adequate security. Akerman said the Cubans are concerned that a successful Garcia visit to Colombia would increase the likelihood of the talks being moved from Cuba to Colombia, which they do not want. (Akerman said Galan told him the Cubans are trying to discredit him with the ELN, saying that Akerman told the Norwegians the talks should be in Oslo, a bad idea in Cuba's view because "the Norwegians are too close to the Americans." Akerman said he did say that in Havana, but in a private conversation outdoors with the Norwegian Ambassador. "They must have powerful directional mikes," Akerman said.)

¶5. (C) In Akerman's view, Cuban influence over Garcia is increasing. He said Galan showed him correspondence he has had with Garcia over a period of several months, and Akerman said the letters showed a more hardline Garcia has emerged over that time.

Garcia Cuts Down Colombia Trip

¶6. (C) Akerman said Garcia planned to disregard Cuban advice and come to Colombia on April 17 as planned, but would stay until April 21 instead of April 28, and intended to be in Medellin ("Casa de Paz") rather than also visit Bogota. (Weekend press reports confirmed this account.) Akerman reported that Garcia would have "special food" to prevent a poisoning attempt. According to the Norwegians, the ELN is convinced its peace talks representatives will not face arrest in Colombia, but regards the risk of an Interpol arrest outside Colombia as high.

ELN Thinking

¶7. (C) According to the Norwegians, the ELN has become more focused in recent weeks but is "treading water, not advancing." Charge Endresen said the ELN is following two tracks: (1) looking to make progress on the peace process; and (2) looking to gain political support among Colombian civil society groups. Both objectives are equally important, in the ELN's view. Endresen said Galan is still not convinced that the GOC wants to make peace. The ELN appears to believe it can pressure civil society to pressure the GOC, an assessment the Norwegians regard as naive.

¶8. (C) Endresen said the ELN understands the importance of a cease-fire but claims there is no way to enforce it. Galan told the Norwegians in Havana that the FARC would not respect such a cease-fire, and therefore the ELN needed to make a deal with the FARC before agreeing to terms with the GOC.

Endresen tends to accept the ELN's bona fides in this case, but he conceded that others think the ELN is simply buying time.

¶9. (C) Endresen characterized Galan's logic as strange and disingenuous. In one instance, Galan claimed that the GOC's policies (rather than ELN, FARC, and AUC terrorist activities) had caused 3 million Colombians to be displaced. Galan said IDP lives are as valuable as the lives of the ELN's kidnap victims. In Galan's view, a GOC-ELN "deal" should treat IDPs and kidnap victims as balancing each other out, so that no "side" in the conflict was morally superior to the other. Endresen said such weak arguments raise doubts about Galan's commitment to peace, and suggest he is looking to expand the ELN's political support more than prospects for peace.

Norwegian Parameters; Panama Possible Location for Talks

¶10. (C) Endresen said Norway could not invite the ELN to Oslo while the guerrillas continued kidnapping and refused a cease-fire. All three "accompanying countries" are telling the ELN to change its positions on those issues, but Norway is also looking for other possible ELN gestures, such as a "humanitarian exchange" of hostages for prisoners to break the impasse. According to Endresen, the accompanying countries will not invite the ELN to Europe if the GOC remains opposed to moving the talks there. (Akerman said he was engaged in discussions with someone close to the government of Panama regarding moving the talks there, a possibility that Akerman said had the support of GOC Vice President Santos.)

Action Request

¶11. (U) Senior Advisor in the Norwegian MFA Department for Reconciliation and Peace Johan Vibe told polcouns that he would accompany the Norwegian State Secretary for Foreign Affairs to Washington in early May, just before the talks resume in Havana. Embassy would recommend that P or WHA/FO discuss the GOC-ELN peace process with either during their visit.

WOOD